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La Tonte

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Appendix D - UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM
SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

Name: Ashley Connel
College: Arts & Sciences Department: History
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Owen Bradley
PROJECT TITLE: La Tonte

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed: Dr. Owen Bradley Faculty Mentor

Date: 5/2/00

Comments (Optional):

Excellent work.

La Tonte

Ashley M. Connell
Senior Honors History Paper
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Owen Bradley

On August 25, 1944, Louis Guillox recorded the news of Paris's Liberation, but his joy was tainted by a scene he witnessed on the corner of the rue Hillionais.¹ A large group of people followed two armed patriots as they arrested a woman in her fifties and led her to her front door. The "sad victim" walked between her guardians as the crowd jeered and called for a chair. A chair appeared "miraculously" as if someone in the crowd had brought one along just for this reason. But the woman remained standing as the crowd grew silent. She took off her hat and pulled out her hairpins as if she were getting ready for bed. She was very pale- "the color of plaster." From time to time, a tear would roll off her cheek. As she arranged the pins in her hand the crowd pressed in and she was ordered to sit down.

He was also in his fifties. Only the day before he had been the one wiping his feet on a photo of Hitler. He screamed, "Vieille putain! Combien que tu en as fait tuer, de patriotes? Combien? Dis, Combien?"² His accusation went unanswered, but the operation had already begun. A wave of horrible laughter accompanied the first clips of hair. The "patient" lowered her head but did not break down. The crowd continued to taunt her and reminded her that she was fortunate that all they were cutting was her hair. She was ordered to stand up, and as she did a muffled voice called out, "Une tete de bagnard!"

Guillox concluded that she had indeed the hideous head of a convict. Her head seemed to have been peeled making her features seem swollen beneath her white skull. Only after her "executioner" pushed her inside the door did the crowd disperse.³

¹ Louis Guillox, *Carnets: 1921-1944*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1978)

² Translation: Old whore! How many patriots have you had killed? How many? Say, how many?

³ *Ibid.*, 410-411.

Guilloy's account of this event is just one of the many reports of this bizarre form of punishment known as "la tonte" in French. This short-lived phenomenon swept through France in the summer of 1944 as the Allied forces pushed across France liberating the country village by village. This strange display of patriotism and revenge accompanied the majority of the celebrations of the German retreat. Women like the one in Guilloy's account were usually rounded up by French patriots or Resistance fighters and led to a public place where their heads were shaved in front of their fellow townspeople. The shearings were intended to be a form of punishment for the women who participated in *la collaboration horizontale*. During the four years of German occupation, these *collaboratrices* had engaged in sexual relations with the German soldiers thereby allowing themselves to be defiled by the enemy. Be it for survival, love, or personal gain, their fraternization with the enemy became the ultimate sin against la Patrie, and in the frenzy surrounding France's Liberation their treason was punished in a fashion that forever changed the face of the Liberation.

The tonte as a form of punishment died out as quickly as it started and has proven to be a difficult subject for historians to tackle. Those who seemed so proud of their act of vengeance at the time quickly fell silent in the months directly following the Liberation. For the most part, neither the shearers nor the sheared are willing to share their experience, which creates a type of willful forgetting on a national level. What do the existing historical accounts and literary interpretations of the tontes show us about the participants, and why does this sense of national shame surround the memory of the tontes? The sexual relations took place in the most private of spheres but were treated as a public issue. What were the issues of national identity embedded in this crime? What

exactly were the shearers attempting to punish and why did it lead to this particular form of punishment? An almost tangible cloud of ambiguity continues to shadow any attempt to explain or cast judgements on the events, but the tonte itself provides a revealing look at the very heart of France at the Liberation. By exploring the many historical accounts and literary interpretations, one is able to take an in-depth look at the state of the nation at this important moment in France's history.

To assess the magnitude of the treason supposedly committed by these women it is helpful to examine the codes of conduct prescribed by the Resistance. Near the end of 1941, Jean Bruller clandestinely published La Silence de la Mer (The Silence of the Sea) under the penname "Vercors." It was the first of many novellas to be secretly published by Editions de Minuit, a covert Resistance publishing operation. Like other pamphlets and articles circulated throughout France, La Silence de la Mer was intended to remind the occupied nation of its duty to resist the enemy and give them an example to follow. It is the story of a young girl and her elderly uncle who have their cottage appropriated by a German officer, but through their obstinate silence they are able to preserve their integrity and their dignity. He has invaded their home but not their lives. Each night he would visit them and drone on about Germany's glory, his love for France, and his desire for her acceptance; however, his monologues were always met with a distant silence "as if the officer didn't exist, as if he had been a ghost".⁴

The silence of the girl was emphasized because it was she the German desired. Her acceptance would have erased his guilt and given him France's soul. Upon her fell the burden of fending off the soldier's advances and she alone possessed the power to

⁴ James W. Brown & Lawrence d. Stokes, The Silence of the Sea/ Le Silence de la mer: A Novel of French Resistance during World War II by "Vercors", (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 73.

keep him from gaining all of France and its blessing. When her uncle was tempted to give up his silence, her indignation saved them.⁵ She was tested by the German's persistence and supposed charm, but she never broke her silence. Even when forced to interact with him by having to lead him to his room, she did so "without looking at the officer just as if she had been alone."⁶

Vercors created this steadfast young woman as the model for all French women, but when applied to the actual situation that people were living everyday, such staunch resistance proved an enormous task. Four years of seeing the soldiers on a daily basis made it inevitable that the French would begin to see beyond the German uniform. For some, the hatred for their oppressors was enough to preserve their wall of silence, but for others, time began to weaken their resistance. Young Micheline Bood was a teenager in Paris during the occupation, and her journal provides an interesting glimpse at the confusing evolution of her feelings towards the Germans. In July of 1941 after reading her journal from the year before, she was able to identify how just one year of cohabitation with the enemy had affected her perspective. "I hated everything that was German, without distinction."⁷ However, by 1941, she found herself spending all her time staring out the window at the German soldier stationed across the street. Though she knew "absolutely nothing" about him, she became infatuated with his golden hair and splendid uniform. She was not sure that she loved him and was horrified at the fact that she could love a "boch," but she thought of him constantly because he brought the "unexpected" that had become so "precious" to her mundane existence.⁸

⁵ Ibid., 77.

⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁷ Micheline Bood, *Les années doubles*, (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1974), 109.

⁸ Ibid.

Micheline's feelings towards the Germans and the appropriate code of conduct became even more confused and contradictory as the long months of the Occupation wore on. She began to frequent the swimming pool where the German officers went, impressed them with her knowledge of the German language, and eventually began to have secret meetings with one officer in particular. Her "pilot from the pool," Peter, was very handsome with his "little nose that a model would envy."⁹ Micheline enjoyed herself on her outings with Peter but said she would have had a better time if she "hadn't been so disgusted" with herself for going out "with the Bochs."¹⁰ She condemned the new girl in her class, Jacqueline, as a "vulgar girl without education" because she was "madly in love" with another German. She consoled herself by saying; "I am sure that I could never love a Boch, because there is something in me, probably my education, that saves me. So, I can without fear see Peter again."¹¹ Such moral gymnastics became easier for all the French as the days of the Occupation drew longer. Guidelines for one's interactions with the enemy became as confused as Micheline's own double standard for herself.

Micheline's teenage flirtations never went as far as *la collaboration horizontale*, but she had definitely out stepped the boundaries of the code set by Vercors in Silence of the Sea. Those who went beyond accommodation to varied forms of collaboration did so for a multitude of reasons. Knowing that such relations would result in special gifts from the enemy, some women turned to the German soldiers in order to feed themselves and

⁹ Ibid., 115.

¹⁰ Ibid., 117.

¹¹ Ibid.

their hungry children.¹² Others simply sought the affection and the prestige that accompanied an affair with the “men of the hour.”¹³ One of CoCo Chanel’s biographers speculated that her affairs with various German officers were the result of not only “a cosmopolitan past with an unhappy love life,” but also a “self-interested resentment that prompted her to exploit arymanization in order to recover control of a perfume company lost to Jewish competitors before the war.”¹⁴ However, amongst the countless instances of *la collaboration horizontale* one motivation was indeed a form of true love. Regardless of the origins of such affairs some indeed resulted in the type of forbidden love made famous in “Romeo and Juliet.” And in light of the tonte that would follow such romances, love for a German soldier proved to be as harmful as love for a Montague.

To begin the analysis of the tonte , its victims, and its perpetrators, it is appropriate to start with an examination of those women who had their heads shaved, the tondues. Margurite Duras’ screenplay, Hiroshima Mon Amour, is an excellent starting point for this discussion. Marguerite Duras was a celebrated French author from World War II to her death in 1996. Born in 1914 in Indochina, she came to France when she was eighteen. She was active in the French Resistance during the war and became a prominent voice in France following its conclusion. The film was released in 1959. As the author of the screenplay, she has creative license to emphasize the individual nature of an affair with a German and its implications. She is able to sidestep the generalizations historians are forced to make in order to really explore the many shades

¹² Paul Jankowski, Communism and Collaboration: Simon Sabiani and Politics in Marseille, 1919-1944, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 132.

¹³ Ibid.

of gray that define the tontes. Though Hiroshima Mon Amour is a fictional account, Duras was an active participant in the Resistance, and her perspective is an important indicator of the feelings that many French people shared about the events. Being in the Resistance and still being able to paint a sympathetic portrait of a girl guilty of *la collaboration horizontale* shows even further that there are no absolutes in this conversation.

Margurite Duras worked closely with director Alain Resnais to produce the film that forty years later continues to create a “memorial agitation that historians of the Liberation have yet to explain.”¹⁵ Hiroshima Mon Amour takes place about ten years after the war, and the main character is a French actress working in Hiroshima on a film about the atomic bomb. She remains nameless throughout the film which creates a sense of anonymity. This namelessness gives her a certain universality while still maintaining the very personal nature of the event. While in Hiroshima, she has an anonymous affair with a Japanese man which conjures up painful memories of a past love. Through flashbacks to this past affair and its consequences, the audience discovers that she had been shaven at the Liberation.

The flashbacks return the audience to France and the small town of Nevers at the start of the Occupation. She is eighteen years old and works in her father’s drug store. One day a German soldier comes into the store to have his hand bandaged, and she does so “filled with hate” as she “had been taught.”¹⁶ He returns repeatedly despite her defiance until she finally succumbs to his advances. Mirroring Micheline’s situation,

¹⁴ Edmonde Charles-Roux, L’Irrégulière ou mon itinéraire Chanel, Grasset, 1974, cited in Philippe Burrin, France under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise. (New York: The New Press, 1996), 206.

¹⁵ H. R. Kedward & Nancy Wood, The Liberation of France: Image and Event, (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1995), 309.

"boredom" in Nevers becomes a "tolerated virtue," while love becomes "the great sin."¹⁷

The people grow "used to the war" and "no longer pay attention to the enemy."¹⁸

However, she does not turn to the enemy out of a selfish desire for special favors of

prestige; he is her first love. "Deathly afraid, but utterly happy, I kissed my enemy."¹⁹

She becomes his lover "in twilight, happiness, and shame."²⁰ Duras explores the inner turmoil that accompanies the girl's decision to love her enemy and underlines the conflicting nature of her emotions. Her emphasis on the shame and secrecy that the girl must bear for her love seem to cancel the crime of his nationality.

Our sympathy for the girl is compounded by her lover's death just hours before she is to run away with him. Her only regret is not that she had been "shaved and disgraced," but that "she didn't die of love on August 2, 1944, on the banks of the Loire" as she watched her lover slowly die of a gunshot wound fired by a Resistance fighter.²¹ She is then led to the Town Square for her punishment. In front of the entire town she seems "almost to offer her head to the scissors."²² Her subsequent madness and her parent's decision to lock her in the cellar are visible signs of her suffering. Though the girl does not accuse her punishers, the audience is left wondering how anyone could do this to such a young girl. Her naivete gives her a childlike innocence.

Marguerite Duras does not, however, paint the portrait of the completely innocent victim. Her main focus is instead upon the many ironies and contradictions that dominate that period in France's history. The petite tondue does feel ashamed for what she has

¹⁶ Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima, Mon Amour: scénario et dialogues*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 104.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

²² *Ibid.*, 99.

done, but her crime is having loved. The girl knows how to hate, but her hate is worn down by the war. The Occupation teaches the French to hate, but it teaches the petite tonduë how to love for the first time. Duras creates an enormous amount of sympathy for the girl through these incongruities, but Duras is not willing to support the girl's choice to love the enemy. The petite tonduë internalizes the conflict between the private crime and the public punishment through her own painful mélange of joy and shame.

Paul Eluard also paints an ambivalent portrait of the tonduë in his poem,

"Understand Who Will."²³

Comprenne qui voudra

En ce temps-là, pour ne pas chatier les coupables, on maltraitait des filles. On Allait meme jusqu'à les tondres.

Comprenne qui voudra
Moi mon remords ce fut
La malheureuse qui resta
Sur le pavé
La victime raisonnable
A la robe déchirée
Au regard d'enfant perdue
Découronnée défigurée
Celle qui ressemble aux morts
Qui sont morts pour être aimés

Une fille faite pour un bouquet
Et couverte
Du noir crachat des ténèbres

Une fille galante
Comme une aurore de premier mai
La plus aimable bête

Souillée et qui n'a pas compris
Qu'elle est souillée
Une bête prise au piège
Des amateurs de beauté

Et ma mère la femme
Voudrait bien dorloter
Cette image idéale
De son malheur sur terre.

Understand Who Will

At the time in order to not punish the guilty they maltreated prostitutes They even went so far as to shave their heads.

Understand who will
For me my remorse was
The poor girl left lying
On the pavement
The reasonable victim
With a torn dress
With the look of a lost child
Uncrowned disfigured
Who resembles the dead
Who died for being loved

A girl made for a bouquet
And covered
With the black spittle of shadows

A gallant girl
Like the dawn on a first of May
The most likeable animal

Soiled and who has not understood
That she is soiled
Animal caught in the trap
Of the lovers of beauty

And my mother the woman
Would have cradled in her arms
This ideal image
Of her misery on earth.

²³ Paul Eluard, Selected Writings, Trans. Lloyd Alexander, (Norfolk: New Directions, 1951), 112-113.

Unlike the the girl in Hiroshima Mon Amour who is quite ashamed of her forbidden love for the enemy, "la malheureuse" in Eluard's poem is given no qualifying story of true love. In fact, the only hint of the nature of the girl's relation with the enemy is found in the preface to the poem, "they maltreated the prostitutes." However, here it is important to note that the poet uses the word "*filles*" rather than *prostituées* because "*filles*" means "little girls" but can also be used for prostitutes. Eluard's intended ambiguity is lost in the English translation. The translator is making judgements about the girl in his effort to better explain the situation, but in so doing he removes some of the ambivalence that is at the very heart of Eluard's poem. The girl may be a prostitute, but she is also "une fille gallante."

Eluard challenges his audience in the very title of the poem, "Comprenne qui voudra," to try and understand what the girl cannot. Eluard describes the *tondue* as having been "soiled and who has not understood that she is soiled." Does the poet think that she has been soiled by her affair with the enemy, or is he just reflecting the sentiments of the community? Is it possible that she is soiled by the *tonte* itself? Like Duras, he emphasizes the childlike nature of the *tondue*. He compares the *tondue* to "a lost child," and he uses the term *fille* more than once to describe the girl. The fact that she is unable to understand that she has been soiled also likens her to a child. However, he also dehumanizes the girl through his description of her as "la plus aimable bête." *Bête*, itself, could mean animal, beast, or foolish. The poet combines these meanings in a way that dehumanizes the girl and points out her ignorance in the situation

In the end, Eluard seems torn between creating sympathy for the girl and objectifying her. Where Duras attempts to give the image of the *tondue* a qualifying

history, Eluard reduces the “malheureuse” to an “image.” Duras’ purpose is to restore the tondues’ humanity, but Eluard seems tempted to take it away. Perhaps, it is that Margurite Duras was writing 13 years after the Liberation, and Eluard was writing only months after the event while the wounds of the Occupation were still fresh. On the other hand, it is also possible that Eluard’s poem shows some of the penned up feelings of betrayal, rejection, and sexual frustration that were specific to French men following the Occupation. No matter what the explanation for the differences between the two, the contrasting literary portraits are proof of the wide range of feelings in France both then and now towards the crime and punishment of *la collaboration horizontale*.

Such contrasting opinions and ambiguities can also be found in historical accounts and photographs of the shearings as well. Most accounts, however, must be viewed with caution because of the emotionally charged atmosphere in which they were produced. Oftentimes these sources are expressions of personal agendas or beliefs and are quite biased, but they are still important as indications of the popular views of that time. Historical descriptions of the tonte also vary widely because it took on so many different forms in France. The tontes ranged from the simple act of head-shaving to the more cruel extremes of stripping the women and parading them through the streets or tying them “naked to the balconies of town halls” as one correspondent in the Gironde recalled.²⁴ In Rennes, the women were sheared and then dunked in a bath for having soiled themselves through sexual relations with the enemy.²⁵ Georgette Elgey, a Fourth Republic historian, reported, “On the Place de l’Eglise, a crowd. A woman from a

²⁴ Kedward, 157.

²⁵ Alain Brossat, *Les Tondues: Un carnaval moche*, (Levallois-Perret: Editions Manya, 1992), 40.

nearby village is on her knees, shaven. She is said to have 'collaborated,' shared a bed with a German. Stones are thrown at her. I am horrified."²⁶

Just as the punishment had assumed many different forms so did the way in which the women responded. The Chicago Tribune reported two different accounts of the tonte on August 19, 1944 in an article benignly entitled, "Women Lose hair as French Celebrate." The shavings had occurred in Chartres and St. Raphael on August 16 and 18, respectively. In Chartres, a "small courtyard covered with hair" was filled with thirty women "who had consorted with German troops" and their punishers. Most of the women remained silent as their heads were shorn, but one eighteen year-old girl "ran behind a door and sobbed, 'I have not been with Germans.'" Was she telling the truth? Was she one of the many victims of rumor? Regardless of what really happened, her fear and denial shows us her lack of power in the situation and her shame for being a tondue. In St. Raphael, most of the 25 girls "wept and buried their heads in their hands" also evidencing their shame and their pain. However, "one woman with golden brown tresses crossed her knees and tilted her head coyly" as the barber worked. What did her complacency show about the situation? We can never know exactly what was going through her mind or the minds of any of those involved, but the stark contrast between her defiant behavior and the intense shame and sorrow expressed by the other women in the article shows how differently the tonte affected its sufferers. Some might have been aware that their crime of treason could have merited death in the eyes of a blood thirsty crowd, but others could not understand how their affairs had made them traitors against their nation.

²⁶ Kedward, 157.

With shaved heads, these women and the magnitude of their crimes became indistinct from each other. A photograph taken in Chartres on August 18, 1944 after the Tribune's account of the shavings by the famous American photographer, Robert Capa, shows that the town was still celebrating its Liberation.²⁷ An overwhelming sense of ambiguity as thick as the crowd follows the *tondue* down the narrow street of Chartres (see figure 1). Those unfamiliar with photos of the *tonde* might have immediately associated the woman with the horrific images of the Holocaust, but in the eyes of her fellow townspeople happy to witness her punishment, she was no victim. She seemed to have shut out everyone but the baby in her arms, the evidence of her *collaboration horizontale* with a German soldier. Is her refusal to acknowledge the crowd out of pride or fear? Does she gaze upon her child with affection for the token of her love or with humiliation for the evidence of her shame? Had she been in love like Duras' petite *tondue*, or was she like Eluard's prostitute unaware that she had been soiled? What if she had indeed been an *informatrice* responsible for sending her neighbors to their deaths?

Unfortunately, this photo cannot answer such questions. Photographs are nothing more than images that often conceal the truth. Through the shavings, these women were cast in the role of living images. Their distinct histories were erased by the *tonde* and were uniformly replaced by the ambiguity and the shame of their visual punishment. They became all at once petite *tondues* and *informatrices*: walking symbols of France's shame.

At the time, the *tondues* were images of France's disgrace for *la collaboration horizontale* and the collaboration on the part of the nation as a whole. However, following the Liberation the defeated and those guilty of collaboration adopted a new

²⁷ Robert Capa: *Photographs*, (New York: Aperture, 1996), 113.



FIGURE 1

interpretation of the events. These memories of those who sympathized with the collaborator's cause were formulated into a revised version of history and came to be known as the *legende noire*. This new interpretation negated the ambiguity surrounding the Liberation by reversing the roles and making victims out of the villains.²⁸ In order to contradict the golden picture of the Resistance, the *legende noire* emphasizes the evils committed by the Resistance fighters committed at the Liberation and likens the whole scene to the Terror that accompanied the French Revolution. The tondue serves as the perfect symbol for the *legende noire* because she can be seen as the victim and the martyr while the tondeur becomes an unjust, violent monster. To better understand the tonte as a whole and to begin to look at the source of this violence we must take a closer look at the tondeur.

In literature the tondeur is often much like the faceless monster of the *legende noire*. The complexity and uncertainty surrounding the role and motivation of the tondeur, like the image of the tondue, is hidden by generalizations. The story of the tonte often forms the backdrop of French novels about the war and the Liberation as a way to illustrate the many dimensions of the chaos associated with the events.²⁹ The tondeur's portrait is usually the same. Alain Brossat, author of Les Tondues: Un Carnaval Moche, presently the only book in print entirely devoted to the subject, cites many examples of the tondeur in French literature.³⁰ According to Brossat, the generic portrait of the tondeur has been used as the symbolic "cliché of the anonymous anti-hero". The tondeur in French literature appears as the "absolute Other": the incarnation of mediocrity and "la

²⁸ Brossat, 88.

²⁹ Ibid., 51.

³⁰ Ibid., 48-52.

mauvaise histoire.”³¹ Like the petite tondue of Hiroshima, Mon Amour, the tondeur is nameless, but he is also faceless. Often labeled with the indefinite third person singular French pronoun, *on*, his individuality and humanity is downplayed to reemphasize his separateness as a tondeur from the rest of the French at the Liberation. It is necessary for the authors to separate the tondeur from the crowds who applauded him; thus, allowing him to take on all the blame and ugliness of the joyous event.³²

In Eluard’s poem, the tondeur does not even exist. The poem takes place after the shaving has been completed with “the poor girl left lying on the pavement.” The only allusions to the tonte are in the descriptions of its effect upon the tondue; the perpetrator is totally absent. Such an omission could indicate Eluard’s unwillingness to address his own culpability in the act. Though he played no role in the tonte and tried to separate himself from the tondeurs through his use of the word *on* in the poem’s preface, his admission that the girl was “soiled” increases the ambivalence surrounding his feelings. He expresses “remorse” for witnessing the event without doing anything, yet in his later explanation of the poem he describes the tondues as “the lamentable idiots trembling with fear under the laughing crowd.”³³ In the next breath, however, he again seems to support the girls by saying that “they had not sold France.” He is unable to defend or condemn the tondues, and this ambivalence necessarily carries over into his opinion of the tondeurs. His choice not to discuss the tondeur might well fit in with Brossat’s assertion that such male authors were attempting to expel that “unknown *tondeur-voyeur-jouisseur* who, one imagines, is sleeping in the very depths of the innards of each male.”³⁴

³¹ Ibid., 49.

³² Ibid., 57.

³³ Paul Eluard, Au Rendez-vous allemand, (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1945), 71.

³⁴ Brossat, 51.

Margurite Duras, however, does address the complicated role played by the *tondeurs*. As previously stated, a sense of wrongdoing by the *tondeurs* exists even though the *petite tondu*e does not explicitly denounce her punishers. Brossat argues that frustration and mediocrity are the typical literary interpretations of the motivations behind the *tonte*, but Duras goes further in her examination of the *tondeurs*.³⁵ She describes how they shaved the girl's head "almost absent-mindedly."³⁶ The act seems to gain a force of its own. "She had to be shaved;" it is their "duty."³⁷ The *petite tondu*e says herself that "they think it's their duty to do a good job shaving the women's heads."³⁸ Duras shows that the *tondeurs* seemed obligated to carry out this strange punishment, but obligated to whom and for what purpose? Does the private crime inherently demand such a public punishment? Duras says, "This city was made to suffer. This compensates." The town needed some sort of revenge after their long suffering under the Occupation, and the public humiliation of these women helped satisfy that desire. Why do the *tondeurs* have to carry out this specific punishment? The *petite tondu*e ventures one possibility, "I still think that if the people who shaved my head had remembered how long it takes for hair to grow back, they would have thought twice about shaving me. It was by a lack of the men's imagination that I was disgraced."³⁹ It does not matter to the unoriginal *tondeur* that she was barely twenty and meant no harm, that the German was her first love, or that in her secret heart she kissed her enemy with an "irrepressible happiness" but also "death in her soul."⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid., 50.

³⁶ Duras, 98.

³⁷ Ibid., 99.

³⁸ Ibid., 61.

³⁹ Ibid., 107-108.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 88.

The need to exercise this uncreative duty seemed to be for Duras the driving force behind the tontes. Not so surprisingly, many historical accounts cite this same sense of duty. Elsa Triolet, the wife of Louis Aragon, recorded the Liberation of Montelimar. She said that the men guarding the women who were to be shaved did so with disgust "but also with a certain sense of duty."⁴¹ Gertrude Stein described the "coiffure of 1944" as "terrible," but she also asserted that the punishment was "logical."⁴² It is very interesting that all three of these women described the tonte with the same fatalistic tone. They recognized a force, a logic, and a sense of duty driving the tondeurs. The tondues were perceived by their countrymen to have avoided the suffering of their nation through the love or privileges they gained through their relationships with the enemy. At the Liberation, the tondeurs felt obligated to make these women suffer as atonement, but another question still lingers: Why this specific punishment?

The tonte had been the tradition punishment for women who committed adultery since the Middle Ages. The wife of Louis X, Margurite de Borgogne, was shorn and strangled as an adulteress in 1315 on orders from her husband.⁴³ Like the scarlet letter, the shaved head served as a visual record of her sin. The public nature of such a punishment was as terrible as Gertrude Stein said but was so much more fitting for the tontes of 1944. This time the adultery was committed against the community. According to an editorial by the Communist magazine, Travailleur Alpin, on September 15, 1944, the tondues had polluted the national blood. "They represent in the nation that which represents the killer, the paid assassin... they sold the blood of their French brothers

⁴¹ Herbert R. Lottman, The People's Anger: Justice & Revenge in Post-Liberation France, (London: Hutchinson, 1986), 67.

⁴² Gertrude Stein, Wars I have Seen, (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1945), 160.

⁴³ Kedward, 156.

because there is no longer anything in them which represents the French woman."⁴⁴ As mentioned before, the tonte did not distinguish between Duras' petite tondue and the *informatrice*. They were one, and together they had committed treason against the community by polluting the French race with German blood.

Sexual relations with a German became an issue of national identity, not only because the women had betrayed their countrymen, but also because of the sexual imagery already deeply embedded in French nationalism. Jean Paul Sartre noted that throughout French literature the relationship between Germany and France always took on an aspect of a sexual union "where France plays the role of the woman."⁴⁵ In Silence of the Sea, the German officer constantly proposes the idea of a "marriage" between the two nations. He noted that "France cannot fall willingly into our open arms without losing her dignity in her own eyes,"⁴⁶ but he believed that Germany would eventually "conquer the silence of all of France."⁴⁷ He told the story of the Beauty and the Beast and explained how Germany, the Beast, could be transformed if France, the Beauty, would accept him. Germany could occupy and dominate France, but he could never take her soul unless she consented "to unite herself" with the Beast.⁴⁸ Thus, against such a backdrop of sexually charged imagery, sexual relations with a German inherently became a national issue.

The girl in Silence of the Sea did not break her silence. She did not concede her remaining power over her enemy by uniting with him, because that was all France had left: her dignity. This dignity is most succinctly embodied in the image of Marianne, the

⁴⁴ Cited in Brossat, 85-86.

⁴⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, Situations, III, (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 58.

⁴⁶ Brown, 86.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 80.

symbol of France. She all at once symbolizes power, grace, and purity. Because France is personified as a woman, the symbolic purity of the French women was a national characteristic. The sexual honor of the man rests on the honor of his woman. Just as the French men were to protect Marianne, they were also to protect their women. The invasion and occupation of the female body of France paired with the French women's willful acceptance of the Germans' invasion of their bodies would symbolically constitute a total defeat for the French. The women's bodies, therefore, became the "site for a bitter national struggle resulting in the tontes as the symbol of their betrayal."⁴⁹ The women betrayed their nation through their willing acceptance of the enemy's invasion of their bodies. Through the tonte, the women were rid of the charms they had used to lure the enemy. They were humiliated on their very bodies in an effort to compensate for the shame they had brought their nation.

Many historians take this interpretation of nationalism and symbolic adultery one step further by transforming it into a gender issue. Writing about gender in France during the Occupation, Joan Tumblety stated that through the tontes the women paid the price "for stepping out of the bounds of the images of perfection they were supposed to represent and suffered through their very bodies the penalty of a masculinity in crisis and of the shamed national entity of France."⁵⁰ Corran Laurens whose dissertation was on this subject alleged that the tontes were a type of "gender-based violence inflicted by men on the bodies of women."⁵¹ According to Alain Brossat the shearings were a "patriotic

⁴⁸ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁹ Joan Tumblety, "The Real and The Imaginary: Political Discourse and Gender in France During The Occupation, 1940-1944," *European Legacy* 1996 1 (1): 31-35.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 34-35.

⁵¹ Kedward, 155.

orgasm."⁵² The long night of sexual dispossession and impotence was over, and the French men sought revenge.⁵³ The "tondeur with his big scissors and little penis" was able to reassert his manhood by humiliating those women whose willing acceptance of the enemy had threatened him most.⁵⁴

The Germans had defeated France in a short six weeks humiliating the men in an area they valued most: war. This "maleness" of the humiliation compounded the feelings of impotence and betrayal felt by the French men. They had failed to protect their country identified as feminine.⁵⁵ The fact that it was the girl whose approval the German officer sought in Silence of the Sea and not her uncle's is an appropriate illustration of the men's predicament. Before the war, women were not even allowed to vote, and the men ran the country. During the Occupation, however, the women gained important roles in the economy and the Resistance. The French women's power to satisfy a German desire that the men could not discounted the men in the whole struggle. The man's only means of appeal to the Germans was through collaboration which, according to Sartre, was emasculating in itself. He described the union between the collaborator and his "master" as sexual. The collaborator became "feminine" without any power of his own and was nothing more than the "ruse" or the "seduction."⁵⁶

The maleness of the humiliation would seem to support the idea that the tonte was a gender issue. A series of photographs from the Imperial War Museum printed in Corran

⁵² Brossat, 49.

⁵³ Ibid., 111.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁵ Kedward, 119.

⁵⁶ Sartre, 58.

Laurens article seem to illustrate the tonte as a gender-based violence.⁵⁷ The same two men are seen in four of the pictures in the article (see figures 2 to 5). The two men are always labeled as “French Patriots” by the original captioning, but these patriots seem more than happy to carry out their uncreative duty. The two are seen at the door of one of the *collaboratrice*’s homes before they are to take her to be shaved. A sequence of two photos shows, first, the men actually shaving a girl’s head and then posing beside their handiwork (figures 3 and 5, respectively). This shearing takes place in the countryside rather than in a public square, but the lack of an audience does not seem to limit their satisfaction from their exploits. The one in the hat beams proudly into the camera with his hands on his hips and his lips puffed in a swollen smirk. His partner is looking away and grinning from ear to ear. These men appear to be totally gratified by their conquest as if they had quenched a desire beyond their patriotic duty.

Thus, the theories that the tonte was a gender-based violence seem quite credible, but we must not be too quick to write off the phenomenon as entirely male. Women also played a role in the whole spectacle that is too important to be ignored. Though no accounts of women doing the actual shaving seem to exist, the voice and presence of the women at the scene serve as a constant, encouraging force. Going back to Louis Guillox’s account, there were three specific examples of the women’s participation in the tonte. In his first account, previously cited in this paper, he recorded the voice of a woman as the first cuts of the girl’s hair were made: “Oh! She will burst into tears before the end!”⁵⁸ This woman reveled in the pain and the humiliation that the girl was forced to endure. In Guillox’s later account, the townspeople were crowded outside the door of

⁵⁷ Kedward, 159-173.

⁵⁸ Guillox, 411.

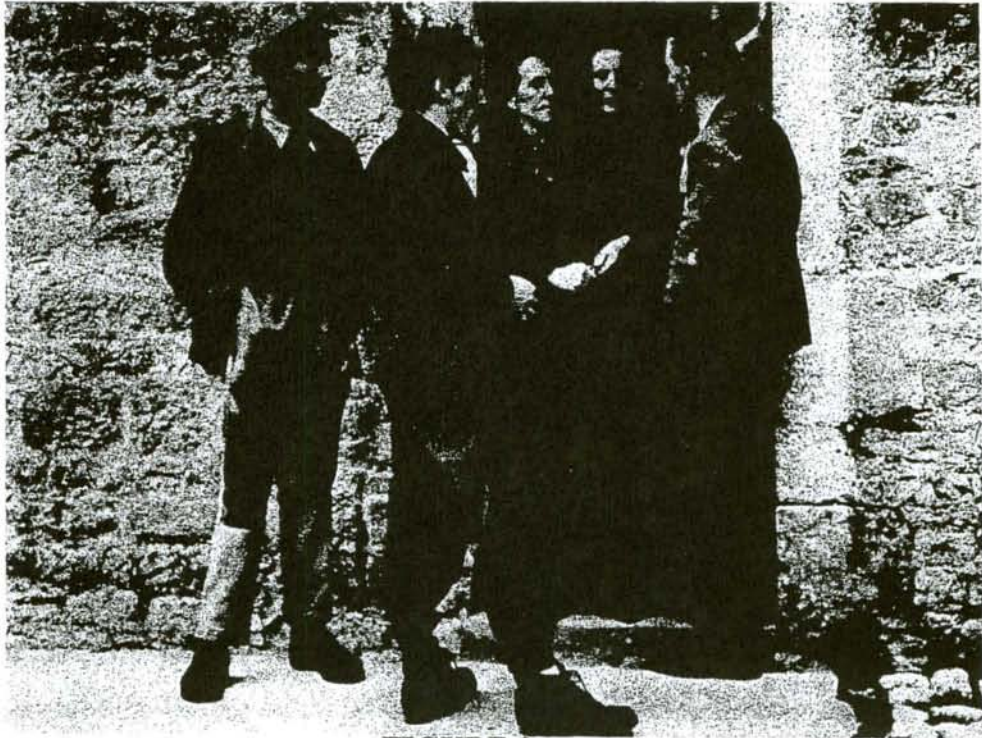


FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3



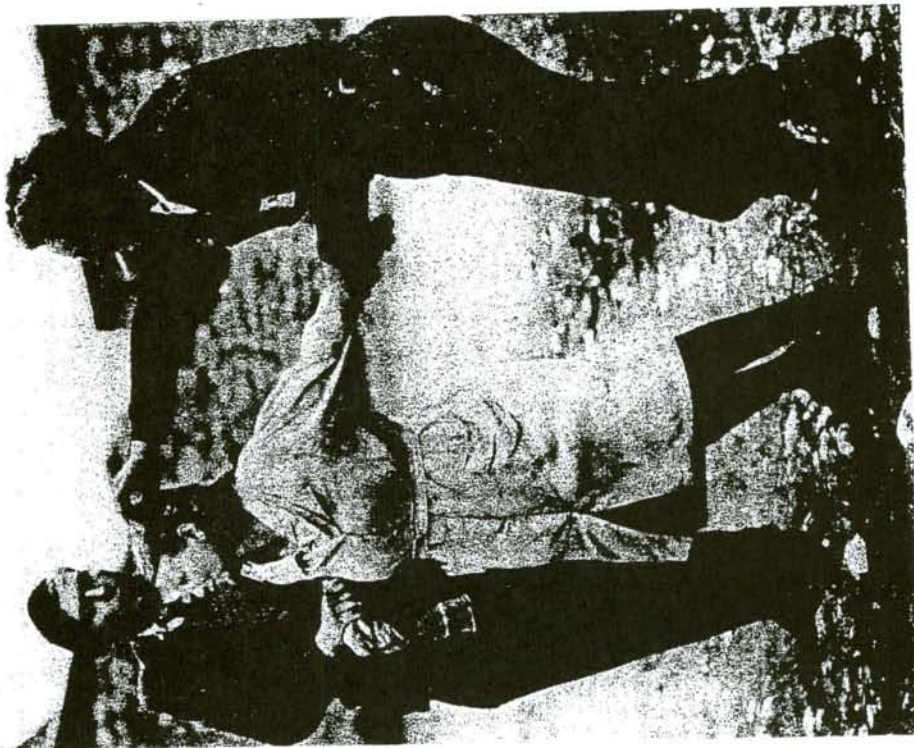


FIGURE 4

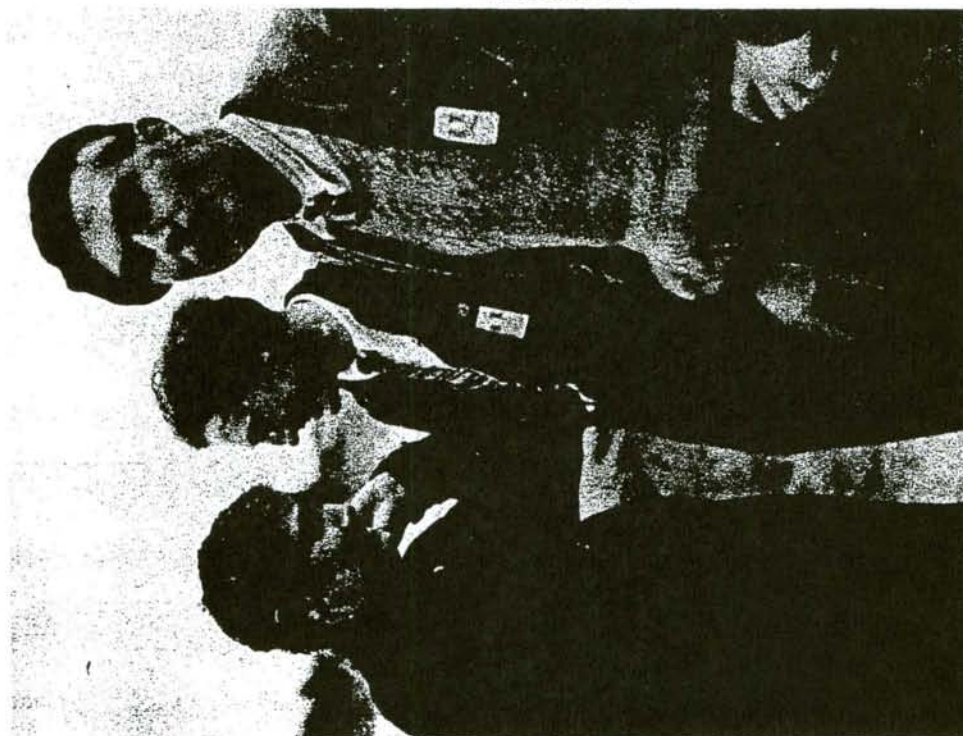


FIGURE 5

a girl who was to be sheared. A young man barred the door and the crowd seemed to forget their cause when "a tall and fat woman in pink" brandished two photographs of another woman kissing her "Boche."⁵⁹ The crowd recognized the woman in the picture immediately, and they began to jeer and laugh. This woman's gossip would probably lead the hungry crowd to its next victim. Guillox recorded a third example of a woman's role in the spectacle: the meddling spinster. In the midst of the ridicule of the woman in the photo, Guillox heard the old lady warn a younger girl, "You see, if ever one day you want to sleep with a Boche..."⁶⁰

The list of women's involvement at the tontes continues. "An old woman hit one of the girls on the head with a basket as she was made to walk through a lane after the hair cutting" in St. Raphael. One girl onlooker in Chartres jeered, "He makes no charge," in reference to the "barber's" fee for his work. The girl who denied her involvement with the Germans was answered, "She lies" by a woman with a rifle hung over her shoulder.⁶¹ Even in Robert Capa's celebrated picture, the *tondue* with her child was flanked by a crowd of more women than men. Dressed in their Sunday best, mothers and daughters watched the procession with smiles on their faces. The punishment becomes a festive occasion and part of the celebration of the Liberation. What does this all mean? Why do they need to get dressed up in order to watch the criminals? What role do women play as the aggressors? In these few examples, the women function as revelers, gossips, and instigators. They serve as the encouraging and constant voice behind the *tonte*. While is

⁵⁹ Ibid., 412.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 413.

seems to be the men's job to carry out the violent action of the shearing, the women supply them with support. Some women probably sought revenge against those who had denounced them or their neighbors. Some must have acted out of spite and jealousy for the special favors the women got in exchange for their relations with the occupying power. Some were ashamed of the disgrace these relations brought French womanhood. Whatever the reasons, women did share responsibility for the tontes.

The tonte still appears problematic as a punishment. Sexual jealousy and revenge do not constitute sufficient explanations for why this phenomenon swept through France that summer of 1944. There are, perhaps, no real answers. The issue at hand is far too complex to resolve with a simple theory, but many partial explanations have been made. Brossat among others has suggested that a type of frenzy arose out of the confusion surrounding the liberation, which sparked this strange display of patriotism. Duras suggested that they simply did not have time to be intelligent. Still others proposed that a sort of *sagesse inconnu*⁶² created the tonte as an alternative to execution. Finally, Sartre discussed the tonte as the symptom of the *fatigue honteuse*⁶³ of the nation.

France was liberated town by town by the Allied forces and, sometimes, the French themselves. Some of the Germans stationed in the regions fought until the end while others evacuated before the Allies even arrived. Central leadership was impossible and the power structure in many of the towns had been completely dispossessed. All these factors combined to create a sort of disorderly vacuum. Brossat explained that the liberation had opened "a breach, a void of some days" where the "order" of before was

⁶¹ *Chicago Tribune*, August 19, 1944.

⁶² Best translated as unknown or unforeseen wisdom.

⁶³ Translated as shameful fatigue.

no longer, and the new “order” had yet to be installed.⁶⁴ France was in a sort of no man’s land between two very different propaganda machines. The Occupation had ended, but France had yet to recommence. People’s opinions and lives had changed under the German rule as we saw from young Micheline’s diary and Hiroshima, Mon Amour. Living under the Occupation would seem interminable, but at the Liberation, the people suddenly found themselves able to reclaim their nation. All the anger, shame, and indignation built up over four years was liberated right along with the people. The feelings of sexual jealousy, male humiliation, and revenge that were penned up in the national consciousness exploded onto the scene through these symbolic acts.⁶⁵ In the frenzy of the hour, fighting the enemy and punishing his helpers became part of the same war.⁶⁶ The confusion released the people’s most basic desires, and to an outsider they must have seemed mad with their freedom.

Margurite Duras also gave her audience a glimpse of France’s celebration full of “joy and confusion.”⁶⁷ She interpreted the times as crazy and frenzied, too, but it was that sense of duty rather than a national madness that caused the tontes. The brevity and insanity of the moment only facilitated the unimaginativeness of their duty. Or, as Duras so much more eloquently wrote herself, “The wind bears the strains of the Marseillaise to the crowd and encourages the exercise of a hasty, ridiculous justice. They haven’t time enough to be intelligent.”⁶⁸ The war would seem to excuse the killing of her German lover, but the image of the petite tondue mad from her loss and her punishment make the equally hasty form of justice “ridiculous.” There was no time to distinguish between

⁶⁴ Brossat, 112.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 110.

⁶⁶ Lottman, 65.

⁶⁷ Duras, 95.

informatrices and those only guilty of *la collaboration horizontale*. They were all guilty and time afforded no rehearsals. Duras directly correlated the tonte with the bombing of Hiroshima because they both could have seemed justified by the necessity of the moment but became a "hasty, ridiculous justice" with hindsight.

Others suggested, quite to the contrary, that in the urgency of the moment the tontes actually resulted in a *sagesse inconnu*.⁶⁹ With all these feelings swirling around in a nation confused about the present and unsure about the future, the people were thirsty for some kind of atonement. Awful as it was, the women were sheared and humiliated, but most of them did not lose their lives. A Gaullist lieutenant excused the tontes to a U.S. soldier in St. Raphael.

"I suppose this looks terrible to some of you people- our letting them do it.

We've got to let them. We can't suppress all this- we can only let them blow off steam and try to keep it under control. You don't know how these people feel. If we clamped the lid on everything, there would be an explosion and we would lose our power to keep order here before we gained it. Some of these girls probably would have been murdered if they hadn't paid the price this way."⁷⁰

Father Roger More, member of the FTP Resistance in the Savoie region told people to "let them do it" because the shearings would divert their energies from killing. He later said that the women wearing turbans to cover their shorn heads would no longer speak to him, "but blood didn't flow."⁷¹ Thus, to some, the tonte proved the lesser evil: one more reversible than death.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 99.

⁶⁹ Brossat, 111.

⁷⁰ Eric Sevareid, *Not So Wild a Dream*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 437.

⁷¹ Lottman, 68.

Jean Paul Sartre also gave his opinion of the tonte in his article in the underground Resistance newspaper, Combat, on September 2, 1944.⁷² In Paris, he encountered the "triste cortege"⁷³ surrounding the fifty year old woman who had been sheared. She wore no shoes and her pantyhose were torn. She walked very slowly shaking her head from left to right and repeating "Non, non, non!" Sartre thought that she appeared to have gone mad. He also noticed the presence of the "young and pretty women" who were singing and laughing very loudly. However, he said that "the faces of the men who were escorting her were without happiness: a sort of *fatigue honteuse* weighed upon them."⁷⁴ The men exercised their duty without gaiety; their patriotic zeal had overpowered them and freed their vengeance. They were so tired of fighting the Germans and each other. They were tired of collaborating and collaborators. They were tired of every choice they made being an issue of national pride. They were tired of resisting. They were tired of being ashamed and ashamed of being tired.

In his account, Sartre did more than just describe the tonte. He asked the questions that the rest of France would soon be forced to face once they had recovered from their fatigue and their frenzy. "Was the victim guilty? Was she any more so than those who had denounced her, those who were insulting her?"⁷⁵ Sartre said without a doubt that the crowd did not completely recognize "the cruelty of such acts," but he thought that it was unfortunate that the crowd had chosen "to express its joy and patriotic zeal through the careless appeasement of their low vengeance."⁷⁶ This disgust combined with the recognition of the unspoken forces of fatigue and carelessness again points to the

⁷² Cited in Brossat, 306-307.

⁷³ Translated: sad procession.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

cloud of ambiguity covering France at the Liberation. Sartre expressed anger and sadness towards the crowd of his countrymen. He was not describing the tonte itself; it had already been done. His ambivalence was directed at France embodied by the crowd. Their "medieval" display was born out of the fatigue and the shame that weighed on all of France, and that is what Sartre showed us: France. His brief account encompasses the issues of collaboration, lost innocence, and revenge that were at the forefront of the French psyche at the Liberation.

Gertrude Stein called the tonte "logical." Paired with the theory of the *sagesse inconnu*, she could be right. At the hour of the Liberation, *la collaboration horizontale* was no less than treason. In the fury and frenzy, such a crime might well have seemed to merit death. There was a sense of duty, a need to punish all the sins of the Occupation, but it was the *fatigue honteuse* that transformed their time of celebration into a time for careless retribution. The nation was so weighed down by the shame of the Occupation that the tondeurs were desperate to avenge their suffering by any means possible. The fatigue of the nation fostered "the exercise of a hasty, ridiculous justice."⁷⁷ The tondeurs ignored the many divisions that fell under the heading of *la collaboration horizontale* in their effort to quickly purge the nation of its shame. They attempted to restore some kind of order, to redraw the lines between right and wrong that had been obscured by the war. The tonte, however, only contributed further to the uncertainty surrounding France's situation. Their attempt at justice became an explosion of violence. The examination of this ambivalent nature of the tonte becomes an intimate look at the state of France at the Liberation.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Duras, 99.

The tonte is the fitting example of how pride and shame combined in the confusion that converted the celebration into condemnation. France's wounds were open to the world and the tonte was the visual symptom of their pain. What do art and literature have left to add that the reality of history has not already so clearly displayed? The shame of the nation was visually inscribed on the bodies of these women. They bore with their humiliation the dishonor of their nation. But literary works are still necessary to acquire the most accurate portrait of the tonte. Without the story of Duras' petite tondue, the visual image would continue to hide the many levels of *la collaboration horizontale*. The tondue as the image could only be seen as either the victim or the traitor. Literature facilitates the exploration of that image into the ambiguous realms where the traitor and the victim are one. The historian must try to be objective, but the literary author has the freedom to identify with the subject and be subjective. While the writer might relish in all the ambiguity, the historian is forced to make sense of it.

It is this ambiguity that characterizes all of France at the Liberation. The lines between innocence and guilt had faded into a mass of gray. Like the petite tondue, some went crazy from their shame. Like many of the tondeurs, some ran mad with their freedom. In 1983, a woman was found in Saint-Flour who had never recovered from the madness brought on from her shearing.⁷⁸ But the petite tondue recovered. The hair grew back. The nation healed. The madness faded. But just as if Marianne, herself, had been sheared, the image of the tondue will go on in the collective memory of the nation as the symbol of France's crisis.

⁷⁸ *Le Monde*, October 22, 1983.

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